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CHAPTER 5

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UPON HIS DEATH IN 1876, YANKEE-BORN CALIFORNIA SETTLER, philanthropist, and recluse James Lick bequeathed USD 100,000 (nearly $3 million in today's dollars) to erect statuary in downtown San Francisco "emblematic of the significant epochs in California history . . . from the early settlement of the missions" to his own.[1] Modeled after the elaborate monuments placed in Paris amid late nineteenth-century "statuomania,"[2] sculptor Frank Happersberger's 850-ton Lick Pioneer Monument (figure 5.1) combined sculptural portraits of famous white explorers, missionaries, and military leaders with scenes of frontier California and female allegories depicting Anglo-American civilization around a phallic stone pillar. And like contemporaneous monuments to Confederate soldiers erected across the American South and beyond, it declared white racial dominance. Read together, the various sculptural elements told a story that would have been familiar to its viewers, one of a Social Darwinist progression from wild American Indians to frontier racial mixing to civilized white society. Newspapers across the United States eagerly followed the monument's creation and celebrated its design. Over the next two decades, Western residents loudly objected to any deviations from the Lick Pioneer Monument's explicit depiction of racial progression in monument proposals for their own cities.

After World War I, Western pioneer statues abandoned such fin de siècle monuments' emphasis on Social Darwinism but continued to declare white cultural dominance. As white Americans grew increasingly confident about their dominance of Western lands, they stopped depicting supposedly disappearing Indians in pioneer-themed statuary. Instead, dozens of remarkably similar statues depicting an iconic white pioneer woman in a sunbonnet striding westward appeared throughout the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. This pioneer woman embodied white civilization and effectively erased the indigenous peoples whom she sought to civilize or displace. Similar imagery of white women carrying European culture to indigenous interior

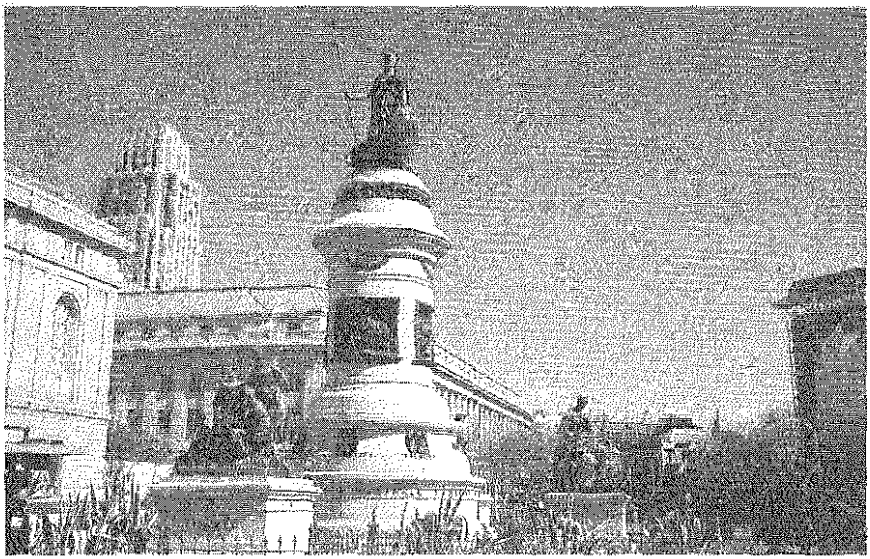

Figure 5.1. Frank Happersberger, Lick Pioneer Monument, 1893, San Francisco, California.
Photograph by Lisa Allen.

peoples also appeared around that time in other settler societies—most notably the Afrikaner *volksmoeder* in South Africa.[3] But the impulse to erect a public statuary in honor of those women was particularly powerful in the United States, where it aligned with national agrarian myths.

Monuments to pioneer mothers—sometimes accompanied by their husband or children—would be erected in cities and smaller towns for the rest of the twentieth century and beyond. Although they did not explicitly depict a hierarchy of races or cultures in the manner of San Francisco's Lick Pioneer Monument, these pioneer mother and pioneer family memorials also celebrated white settler colonialism.[4] Deviations from the accepted image of a woman in a long prairie-style gown and wide-brimmed sunbonnet sparked public protest, such as those in Denton, Texas, in the 1930s, and Salem, Oregon, in the 1950s.

For most of the twentieth century, the Lick Pioneer Monument was largely forgotten by San Franciscans. Like many of the nearly two hundred pioneer monuments erected in the United States since the late 1880s, its urban location declined, and most people walked by the statue without paying it any attention. But plans to relocate the statue in the mid-1990s to accommodate a new city library sparked controversy. Preservationists opposed its relocation. Others wanted it removed altogether, decrying its depiction of white dominance over indigenous Californians. San Francisco's Art Commission compromised

by installing a brass plaque beside the relocated statue acknowledging the devastating effect of white settlement on California's Native American population—from at least 300,000 in 1769 to 15,377 in 1900. But landscaping soon hid that plaque from the public eye.

In the early twenty-first century, scholarly discussions of US Confederate memory and commemoration[5] spilled over into public life. But white Americans remain far less willing to critically examine the nearly two hundred pioneer monuments in their midst. Whether they were erected—like most Confederate monuments—amid xenophobia and near-hysteria over women's changing social roles at the turn of the twentieth century or amid farm crises and debates surrounding multiculturalism at the turn of the twenty-first century, many Americans resist recognizing the racial subtext of statues to Western settlers.

Dozens of pioneer monuments erected from the 1880s through the 1930s commemorate the arrival of Euro-American "civilization" to "savage" native peoples.[6] In contrast, pioneer monuments erected after World War II tend to celebrate white settlers' persistence in an inhospitable landscape. While these more recent statues do not explicitly celebrate settler colonialism and a few seek to embrace cultural diversity by honoring the arrival of the dominant white culture, they indirectly commemorate Indian removal. Yet this racial subtext is rarely acknowledged, coming to light only when some aspect of the statue's design or placement sparks enough controversy to attract public and media attention. The nearly 200 pioneer memorials erected throughout the United States over the past 125 years are material manifestations of changing American ideas about race but also serve as a battleground on which racial hierarchies are both reinforced and challenged. Tracing changes over time in these monument designs and their public reception highlights the extent to which widespread faith in American agrarian ideals rests on a foundation of indigenous dispossession. More broadly, it reveals the ways in which racial hierarchies are subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) enshrined through the erection of statues commemorating founding fathers and self-sacrificing mothers.

TOWERS OF RACIAL PROGRESSION, 1890–1920

The earliest pioneer monuments, erected from the 1880s through the 1910s, emphasized the supposed cultural superiority of white settlers. For example, the Lick Pioneer Monument, discussed in the opening to this essay portraying the Americanization of California, was erected in front of San Francisco's new City Hall in 1894. The monument's central granite pillar features an honor roll of white explorers, missionaries, businessmen, and military and government leaders who brought Euro-American civilization to a supposedly savage land and people. The individuals thus honored represent two common forms of what Lorenzo Veracini calls settler colonial "screen memory": marking initial

colonial exploration and nostalgic narratives of settler pasts.[7] Atop the central spire stand a bronze allegorical depiction of the spirit of white American California and a grizzly bear representing the US state. Female allegories of Plenty and Commerce on lower piers similarly declare the superiority of white American society.

Examining the episodes in California history and the specific individuals that sculptor Frank Happersberger (1858–1932) chose to honor in the Lick Pioneer Monument reveals late nineteenth-century white Americans' notions of their own cultural superiority. Happersberger traced California's history from its supposed discovery by European explorers in the sixteenth century to its annexation and incorporation into the American nation in the late nineteenth. The monument acknowledges California's indigenous peoples only in "Early Days" (a heroic-sized bronze grouping on one of the lower piers) and a relief depicting a white trapper trading with American Indians. In "Early Days," a late eighteenth-century Spanish Catholic missionary stands over an indigenous man who reclines at his feet. "On his face," *San Francisco Call* declared at the monument's dedication in 1894, "you may see the struggle of dawning intelligence."[8] Behind them, a *vaquero* (cowboy), representing California ranching culture under Mexican rule (1821–1848), throws a lasso, his upraised arm echoing the Spanish padre's raised arm and emphasizing their dominance over the indigenous figure. A trio of white Americans representing the sixty to seventy thousand miners who arrived in California during the 1849 Gold Rush balances "Early Days" and carefully erases the presence of Chinese, Mexican, and indigenous men and women in the mines.[9]

Happersberger constructed Anglo-American whiteness through his sculptural telling of the region's history. He placed Sir Frances Drake, who claimed the region for England in 1579, above Spanish soldier Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, the first European to reach California. Spanish mission leader Junipero Serra and Swiss immigrant Johann Sutter (who relied on indigenous labor to build a private fiefdom before gold was discovered on his central California territory, sparking the 1849 Gold Rush) are the only non-Anglophones whom Happersberger honored with portraits alongside Drake, US explorer and infamous military leader John C. Frémont, and monument donor James Lick. Spanish and Mexican military leaders Gaspar de Portolá, José Castro, and Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo are named but not pictured; the indigenous peoples devastated by these white men are excluded altogether from Happersberger's honor roll.[10]

Salt Lake City, Utah, erected a similar pillar of white civilization shortly after San Francisco dedicated its Lick Pioneer Monument. And public outrage forced Frederick MacMonnies to replace a Plains Indian warrior with a white mountain man and Indian massacre leader Kit Carson to depict white cultural superiority in Denver, Colorado, in 1911. After World War I, communities

abandoned Social Darwinist towers of white settlement—and Happersberger's elaborate combination of historic portraits and allegorical figures—in favor of a simpler heroic statuary mounted on a stone base. As white Americans grew confident in their conquest of native peoples, pioneer commemoration shifted toward gendered expressions of whiteness.

WOMEN CARRY WHITE CIVILIZATION WESTWARD, 1920–1940

Communities across the Western United States in the early twentieth century erected statues of generic white settlers. Forty-six pioneer monuments—one-quarter of all pioneer-themed monuments I have identified within the United States—were erected between 1920 and 1940. Iconography in those interwar pioneer monuments coalesced around remarkably similar depictions of a self-sacrificing Pioneer Mother carrying white civilization westward. Of the forty-six monuments erected during those two decades, forty-two (91 percent) focus explicitly on pioneer women. More pioneer *mother* monuments were erected in that period than were all pioneer-themed monuments erected between 1880 and 1920. Twenty depict pioneer women unaccompanied by men. While a few depicted older women in repose, their civilizing work done, most depicted a young woman in a long, simple dress and wide-brimmed sunbonnet carrying white civilization westward.

Yet even these impressive statistics understate the power of sun-bonneted Pioneer Mother imagery during the interwar period. The Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) erected twelve identical manufactured stone *Madonna of the Trail* statues in states stretching from Maryland to California. Because these statues were highly publicized at the time and so many were installed across the country, they helped shape many Americans' mental image of frontier women. Meanwhile, wealthy oilman E. W. Marland sponsored a highly publicized competition to select a "Sunbonnet Woman" statue for his adopted hometown of Ponca City, Oklahoma.[11]

The twelve entries to Marland's design competition toured the country from New York and Boston to Minneapolis and Denver. A reported 750,000 Americans viewed the models and were invited to cast votes for their favorites.[12] According to the *New York Times*, "The exhibition included at least one figure to please almost every taste. And every great school was represented . . . from a figure suggesting the Greek [Arthur Lee's *Faithful*] to another embodying the last phase of modernism [Maurice Sterne's *Determined*]."[13] Despite these stylistic differences, the entries bear striking similarities: all twelve pioneer women are young, white women wearing long dresses. Nine wear sunbonnets. Ten hold babies. Those artists who deviated from popular Pioneer Mother imagery or from the Beaux-Arts style typical of early twentieth-century monumental sculpture were publicly mocked and soundly

defeated. Bryant Baker's depiction of a young woman in a tailored gown and wide-brimmed sunbonnet guiding her young son westward, though dismissed by art critics, was the overwhelming public favorite. It received the most votes in eleven out of fourteen cities; nationwide, his design received 42,478 votes for first choice and a clear plurality overall with 123,000 total votes.[14] It was dedicated before a crowd of some 40,000 in 1930.[15]

Baker's winning *Pioneer Woman* carries a Bible in her right arm, reassuring viewers that this genteel young woman has braved dangers and endured hardships to spread white Christian civilization in a manner in keeping with 1920s' familial and civic maternalism.[16] Yet Ponca City's statue also memorialized the supposed disappearance of the region's native women and men. Where 1890s' monuments had explicitly depicted racial hierarchy, by the 1920s, Social Darwinist towers, such as San Francisco's Lick Pioneer Monument, were no longer necessary. Western Indians were presumed to have vanished, making way for civilized pioneer women, such as Ponca City's winning design. Even in Oklahoma, which had served as a destination for American Indians emigrating and being forcibly removed from the Eastern United States throughout most of the nineteenth century and where native populations persisted, sculptural depictions of indigenous peoples gave way to celebrations of white settlers claiming Indian lands. The scale and popularity of Marland's competition ensured that Ponca City's winning design—like the DAR's twelve *Madonna of the Trail* statues stretching from coast to coast—would linger in the American imagination and heavily influence the design of later monuments.

WHITE SETTLERS CAME TO STAY, 1975–2000

Interest in erecting pioneer monuments declined dramatically after World War II, as national attention shifted from assimilating American Indians in the West to challenging—or defending—segregation in the South. Then, as identity politics and the "Culture Wars" of the 1980s and 1990s sparked public debates about multiculturalism in the nation's progressive coastal cities, rural peoples in the interior of the country facing corporatization and crippling debt embraced pioneer monuments as a means to mark local centennials. These centennial monuments emphasized early settlers' successful use of Euro-American technology, such as steel plows to survive and thrive in harsh Western environments. By constructing bronze and stone narratives of pioneer persistence and dominance of the land, however, these statues also celebrated white dispossession of native peoples stretching back to Thomas Jefferson's vision of a nation of small farms owned by white farmers.

Greg Todd's They Came to Stay—which was erected on the grounds of the Sherman County courthouse in Goodland, Kansas, to mark the county's 1987 centennial—celebrated white persistence on native lands particularly clearly

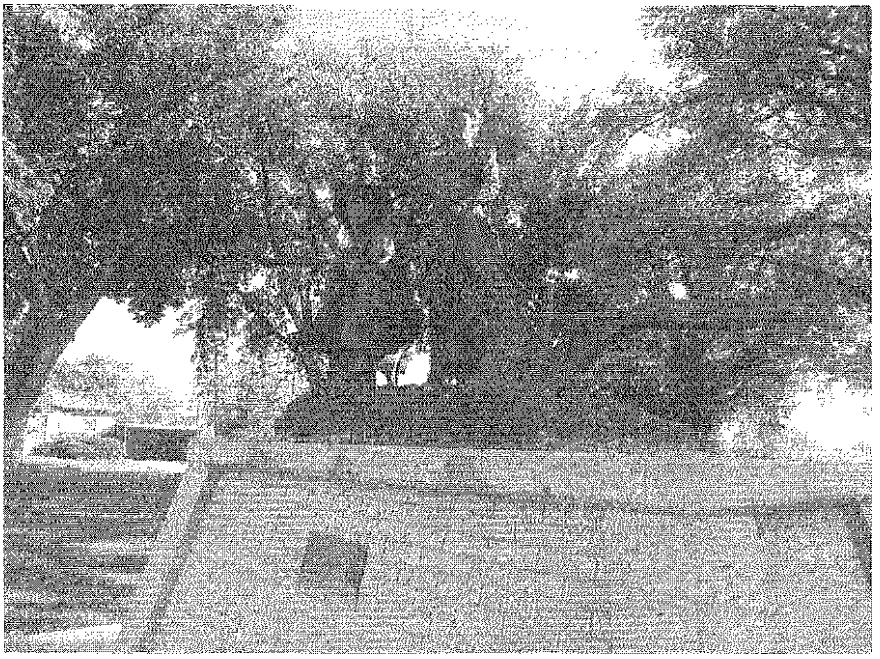

Figure 5.2. Greg Todd, They Came to Stay, 1987, Goodland, Kansas.
Photograph by the author.

(figure 5.2). A white man clad in late nineteenth-century work clothes and a wide-brimmed hat squats down in his field, holding the rich soil in his proper right hand. Beside him stands his young wife; the wind sweeping the high plains blows her long skirt and apron. Her right hand rests gently on her husband's shoulder, indicating her reliance on his strength. Her left holds tightly to one handle of their prominently featured walking plow. Her posture makes clear that she does not manage the plow herself but reserves that physically demanding task for her strong husband. His hard work and ingenuity—and that of other white men like steel plow inventor John Deere—make it possible for them to survive and thrive, transforming tough Kansas sod into the good land celebrated in the town's moniker. But the pioneer woman's presence ensures—like the female allegories of American Progress in San Francisco's Lick Pioneer Monument—that this is no boomtown populated by unattached men seeking to get rich and move on quickly. She relies on her husband and his plow for physical sustenance, but their community relies on her reproductive labor and nurturance for its survival. Together—sculptor Greg Todd and his hometown of Goodland declare—they built a community that survived a century of hardship and would persist in the face of depopulation and crippling agricultural debt.

Western cities a century earlier had declared white American cultural supremacy, seeing modern cities as the pinnacle of human evolution. By the 1980s, smaller farm towns sought to forestall further evolution. Resisting urbanization and the rise of corporate agriculture, they gazed longingly back to a time when the only technology required to support their family was a horse-drawn walking plow. But just as Ponca City, Oklahoma's *Pioneer Woman* celebrated the arrival of white civilization at the expense of American Indians, by commemorating their ancestors' persistence in harsh environments, the Goodland statue and nine similar statues erected on the Great Plains in the 1980s and 1990s also marked native dispossession. And while they do not depict native peoples, six others erected to celebrate Oklahoma centennials since the 1980s—including *Brand New State*, Oklahoma City's forty-five 150-percent-sized bronze figures depicting the 1889 land run—explicitly celebrate whites claiming Indian lands. White settlers "came to stay" on land that they made "good" by removing indigenous peoples, exterminating bison herds, and tearing up native grasses to plant European crops. By erecting and maintaining monuments like Greg Todd's in Goodland, white Westerners choose to remember white settlers who arrived a century earlier and to forget those who had lived on and shaped that landscape for thousands of years. These monuments naturalize and reinforce white cultural dominance.

ATTEMPTED INCLUSIVITY, 1990–2018

In the early twentieth century, monuments that failed to sufficiently celebrate white supremacy sparked public protest. By the 1990s, however, many Americans viewed such depictions of native conquest as culturally insensitive. San Francisco's acclaimed Lick Pioneer Monument—the benchmark against which other early monuments had been judged—became controversial due to its depiction of white dominance, as did efforts to erect new statues to generic white settlers in several other communities. Since that time, a few communities, including Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, have erected pioneer-themed monuments that seek to tell more culturally inclusive stories. Instead of erasing peoples of color, these monuments include them. Avoiding the San Francisco Lick Pioneer Monument's lessons in Social Darwinism, they depict Native Americans or Hispanics alongside white settlers. Yet even these seemingly inclusive new statues reproduce earlier monuments' narrative of progression from primitive indigenes to advanced white society and erase white violence against native peoples.

As scholars and native activists challenged 1990s plans to celebrate the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's supposed discovery of the New World, protestors in San Francisco who associated the Lick Pioneer Monument with cultural humiliation and genocide splashed it with gallons of red

paint. They singled out the monument's "Early Days" bronze grouping depicting a Mexican *vaquero* and a Spanish Franciscan missionary towering over a submissive indigenous Californian as particularly offensive. The city sought to balance the demands of Native activists, preservationists, the Roman Catholic Church, the Spanish government, and diverse other groups by erecting a plaque explaining the history depicted in "Early Days"—a compromise that satisfied no one.[17]

The dozen recent centennial monuments erected in Oklahoma reveal particularly clearly the persistence of racial hierarchies even in seemingly inclusive monuments. While a few of these memorialize settler persistence, most explicitly celebrate whites claiming Indian lands. In response to native activists' protests, Ponca City stripped the title *This Land Is Mine* from its 1993 centennial statue but remained determined to erect the bronze depiction of a white man staking a claim to former Indian lands about a mile from its famous *Pioneer Woman* monument and accompanying museum. Other, supposedly more inclusive, Oklahoma monuments include native peoples as a starting point from which a more successful and whiter society has emerged—thus replicating in a more subtle manner the logic of Social Darwinism.

Broken Arrow, Oklahoma's 2002 centennial monument depicts what appears at first glance to be yet another pioneer family monument celebrating early settlers' persistence in an unforgiving land. Indeed, local residents—including the artist—refer to the piece as *Pioneer Family*. David Nunneley's grouping features a young boy standing in front of his parents, prepared to lead them into the future. The Centennial Commemorative Statue Committee selected the piece because it "combined all the things that have made Broken Arrow a booming community—family, tradition, farming, heritage and hard work"—and even included a nod to the area's Native American heritage.[18]

However, closer examination reveals the ways that Nunneley's piece reinforces white domination even as it celebrates cultural inclusivity. Nunneley's grouping for Broken Arrow depicts a rangy white man united by marriage to what the *Tulsa World* described as a "lithe Indian maiden."[19] A union between a native man and a white woman would raise the specter of American Indian captivity narratives. In contrast, wedding a meek Indian maiden to a strong white farmer gives an illusion of equality, while actually depicting the white takeover of native lands and cultures. The large book that the native woman carries suggests her embrace of the twin blessings of Euro-American education and Christianity carried West by white pioneer women like those still celebrated in Bryant Baker's heroic statue in Ponca City. Yet her knee-length, fringed buckskin dress and moccasins and the two braids hanging down below her shoulders mark the limits of her assimilation. In contrast, her husband's cowboy boots and hat demonstrate his hardy white masculinity. Rather than

embracing one another in marital unity, they stand apart, their arms crossing behind the boy as each separately guides their young son forward. The ripe peaches in the father's bucket and the robust rooster in the boy's arms symbolize local white agricultural industries. The boy's Euro-American features, clothing, and hairstyle assure viewers that white culture will dominate indigenous influences. Only the boy's bare feet call into question his degree of civilization. But viewers clad in modern sneakers or cowboy boots are more likely to view his shoelessness—like his pet rooster—as a nostalgic sign of rural freedom than as a challenge to past or future white supremacy.

RACIAL HIERARCHIES REMAIN

Today, frontier imagery remains powerful in American culture. While many decry Confederate memory as racist, most Americans remain hesitant to recognize the ways in which pioneer monuments also memorialize their nation's racial hierarchy. As several cities voted to remove monuments to Confederate leaders and protestors in Durham, North Carolina, tore down their local Confederate soldier monument, activists once again called for the removal of San Francisco's divisive Lick Pioneer Monument. Apparently swayed by shifting public opinion nationwide, the city's Art Commission voted in late 2017 to remove the controversial "Early Days" grouping. Yet even if the city does remove the Spanish padre, Mexican *vaquero*, and prostrate Indian from one of four bottom piers, placing "Early Days" in storage and leaving an empty pedestal, questions of how to interpret the remainder of the massive monument remain. The central granite pillar with its hierarchical honor role (including the newly sainted Junipero Serra); its heroic grouping of white Forty-Niners; and its allegories of American Commerce, Plenty, and California statehood will remain in place, just as the racial hierarchy that the 1894 statue celebrated remains carved in stone in American society and is continually reinforced by the bronze statues commemorating its arrival across the Western American landscape.

NOTES

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